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# **“A CERTAIN CLASS OF PERSONS AMBITIOUS”: SMOKY MOUNTAIN EXPLORATION AND THE BUCKLEY-CLINGMAN CONTROVERSY**

Kenneth Wise\*

During the summer of 1858, Samuel Botsford Buckley, a free-lance scientist from New York, engaged Thomas Lanier Clingman, longtime congressman from the mountain district of North Carolina, to accompany him on an expedition into the Great Smoky Mountains to measure the elevation of a previously unexplored peak known then as Smoky Dome.<sup>1</sup> At the time, both men held wishful suspicions that Smoky Dome might be the highest point of elevation east of the Mississippi River, and coveted the honors that would accrue to the discoverer. At the conclusion of the expedition both Buckley and Clingman claimed the distinction of having first measured the mountain. Clingman, astute politician and native North Carolinian, advanced his case through the voice of well-placed political cronies who contended on his behalf that Clingman had publicly expressed an opinion that some peaks in the Smokies were higher than those in the Black Mountains of North Carolina, then considered by many to harbor the highest point east of the Mississippi. Buckley, the outsider, responded with published accounts and scientific reports substantiating his claim that he alone had measured and verified that Smoky Dome was higher than any other peak in the North Carolina mountains. The result was a brief, but bitter, controversy that pitted the credibility of the scientist against that of the politician.

Prior to the time of the Buckley-Clingman expedition, local inhabitants of East Tennessee and Western North Carolina generally regarded the Great Smoky Mountains as a somewhat vague entity looming on the horizon and referred to them with no more preciseness than “the mountains” or “the Smoky mountains.” Very few had ventured much beyond the lower foothills and consequently the necessity of naming specific landmarks in an uncharted wilderness was not a matter of pragmatic concern. Viewed from a distance, the Smoky Mountains appear as an amorphous mass of peaks and ridges fading into the adjacent slopes and, more often than not, obscured by swirling mists. Close at hand, the mountains cannot be seen for the trees. The task of naming the mountains remained largely the domain of scientists and explorers who measured and recorded their

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<sup>1</sup>For use of the local appellation “Smoky Dome” see Paul M. Fink and Myron H. Avery, “The Nomenclature of the Great Smoky Mountains,” *The East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications* 9 (1937): 60.

features, individuals who abhorred the confusion and repetition which local mountain lore often perpetuated.<sup>2</sup>

While the common man may have had little time or inclination for investigating distant mountain peaks, there always remained a certain class of ambitious persons who aspired to the distinction of having their names forever affixed to some notable physical landmark. As a landscape, mountains evoke a sense of prominence and permanence. The former quality affords the honored individual proper esteem of public acknowledgment, while the latter offers solid assurance that the individual's name will be suitably recalled long after all else of their mortal existence has been forgotten. Ostensibly, the Buckley-Clingman expedition was a joint venture to verify that the so-called Smoky Dome was the highest point east of the Mississippi. At its root, however, festered a contest of egos, two ambitious individuals striving for the public adulation and temporal immortalization that would come to the person whose name would be most closely associated with this highest point. Within the context of a scientific expedition, each man pursued a strategy markedly different than that of his counterpart. Clingman, by taking advantage of a then-current popular practice of honoring prominent political figures with place-names and by parlaying unfairly upon the scientific achievements of Buckley, adroitly fostered a public perception that he alone was the true discoverer of the highest peak in the Great Smoky Mountains.<sup>3</sup> Buckley, a relatively obscure and not well-liked botanist, attempted to affix his own name to the highest peak in the Smokies by imitating the scientific exploits of prominent nationally known scientists, assigning their names to nearby peaks in the Smokies, and thus insinuating himself into the ranks of the notables.<sup>4</sup>

A careful examination of the Buckley-Clingman expedition, however, challenges the prevailing assumption that Clingman was primarily responsible for the discovery and measurement of Smoky Dome and that Buckley played a secondary role to Clingman. Moreover, it appears that the effort both by Buckley and Clingman to verify the height of the Smoky Dome was never a primary concern for either man, but secondary to their separate ambitions to achieve personal recognition for scientific adventure. In fact, the strategies employed by both men for achieving this recognition were inherently successful, far outweighing any accomplishments of their mountain-measuring efforts.

Born in Yates County, New York, in 1809 and educated at Wesleyan College in Middleton, Connecticut, Samuel Botsford Buckley began his strange career as

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<sup>2</sup>George R. Stewart, "What is Named?—Towns, Islands, Mountains, Rivers, Capes," *University of California Publications in English* 14 (1943): 226-227.

<sup>3</sup>Zelinsky has suggested that during the mid - eighteenth century the process of place - naming in the United States was an unobtrusive measure of political attitude, perhaps even a subtle kind of loyalty test. See Wilbur Zelinsky, "Nationalism in the American Place - Name Cover," *Names*, 31, 1 (1983): 12.

<sup>4</sup>For a discussion of Buckley's standing among his fellow botanists see Ronald Petersen, "Samuel Botsford Buckley's Expedition into the Southern Appalachian Mountains in 1842, with Additional Biographical Notes," *Memoirs of the New York Botanical Garden* 49 (February 1989): 1-10.

an itinerant scientist making forays into Alabama, Tennessee, North and South Carolina, and Florida collecting plants and other natural history objects. From 1842-1843, during the time of his excursions into the Southern states, Buckley was also studying medicine at the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York. Upon leaving his studies, he spent the next twelve years on his family's homestead farm, after which he was employed for two years in a bookstore at Yellow Spring, Ohio. Buckley returned south in 1858 to resume his scientific travels and thereupon embarked on his quest with Clingman to determine the elevations of the highest peaks in the Smokies. At the conclusion of his venture with Clingman, Buckley traveled through the southern Appalachians for another year, then moved to Texas in 1860 where he worked for the remainder of his life except for a brief stint as chief examiner in the Statistical Department of the United States Sanitary Commission during the Civil War.<sup>5</sup>



Clingman's Dome, first known as Smoky Dome, as seen from the west near Siler's Bald. Courtesy of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Buckley's acquaintance with the southern Appalachians began in the spring of 1842 when he visited the Tennessee mountain region in pursuit of new species of plant life.<sup>6</sup> That spring Buckley approached the mountains by way of Knoxville, Tennessee, near the confluence of the French Broad and Holston rivers, and there he obtained his first view of the Great Smoky Mountains, about twenty miles to the south. He then traveled up the French Broad to Dandridge, Tennessee, where he had been told he might find Ferdinand Rugel, a German-born pharmacist and

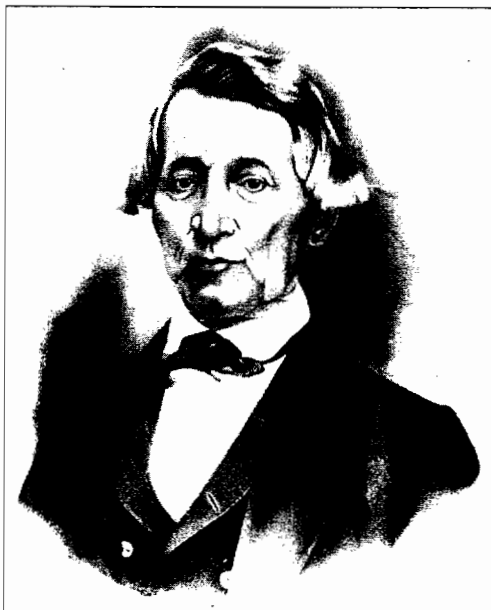
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<sup>5</sup>American Council of Learned Societies, *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York, 1929), 232-233.

<sup>6</sup>S. B. Buckley, "Notes of a Botanical Tour—No. II," *The Cultivator* 2 (July 1845): 212.

recent immigrant from Switzerland who, like Buckley, had deep scientific interests in the great variety of plant life in the southern mountains.<sup>7</sup> Buckley had hoped to persuade Rugel to lead him on a botanic tour of the Smokies. Rugel agreed, and on April 24 the two men proceeded to Sevierville, Tennessee. On the next morning, they continued on towards the mountains accompanied by two friends of Rugel, Drs. Hill and Hammer. The party followed the West Prong of the Little Pigeon River upstream to the "Stephen Hoskin's Log Cabin" near the upper end of the Sugarland valley.<sup>8</sup>

According to Buckley's published record of the expedition, the party left their horses at Hoskin's cabin and "proceeded on foot by a path along the wild, foaming, noisy Little Pigeon." Six miles above Hoskin's cabin, they "struck a path to the left, quitting the river when two miles farther; by ascending a good deal and descending some, [they] reached a small cove where epsom salts were made the preceding summer."<sup>9</sup>



Ferdinand Rugel, a Swiss scientist who immigrated to East Tennessee, explored the slopes of Mt. LeConte with Buckley in 1842. Courtesy of the author.

From the description given, it appears most certain that Buckley and Rugel ascended into the mountains by way of an ancient Indian trace that crosses from Tennessee into North Carolina at Indian Gap. About four miles below Indian Gap, the party turned off the Indian trace and ascended the south face of the Bullhead (now Mount Le Conte) to Alum Cave, a well-known Smoky Mountain landmark and site of the Epsom Salts Manufacturing Company mining opera-

<sup>7</sup>Ferdinand Rugel (1806 - 1879) was an associate of noted British botanist Robert James Shuttleworth to whom he sent many species collected from the Smoky Mountains and elsewhere in the southern states. Parts of Rugel's collections and personal herbarium are now housed in the United States National Museum, the British Museum, and the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and Science. See S. W. Geiser, "Biographical Note on Dr. Ferdinand Rugel, American Botanist," *Field and Laboratory* 16 (June 1948): 113-119.

<sup>8</sup>S. B. Buckley, "Notes of a Botanical Tour—No. III," *The Cultivator* 2 (September 1845): 274-275.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

tion.<sup>10</sup> Buckley and his companions encamped in a small hut once used by workmen processing the epsom salts.

On the afternoon of the next day, Buckley and Dr. Hammer "attempted to ascend a long, narrow, rocky ridge, leading up to one of the main summits." After much crawling, they "emerged onto an open space consisting of loose mica slate rocks, partly covered by a low branched shrub . . . Here my companion looking around and seeing large gulfs on both sides, said he was afraid to proceed farther, and descended. The ridge was so narrow that at a point some 15 or 20 rods farther, there was a large hole through it, which we had seen during our forenoon's excursion."<sup>11</sup>

The "narrow, rocky, ridge" to which Buckley referred is unmistakably Little Duckhawk Peak, one of two barren, knife-edge ramparts that project outward from the face of the mountain near the base of the Alum Cave bluff. From this vantage point, Buckley would, on a clear day, have had a fine view of Smoky Dome, the peak he would later measure and claim as the highest east of the Mississippi. In his report Buckley gave no indication of the viewing prospects from Little Duckhawk Peak except to say that during the morning the weather was "cold, misty and rainy and that only through occasional openings in the cloud that [they] had a glimpse of the rugged peaks."<sup>12</sup> But even with the view partially obscured by the swirling mists that often visit the Smokies, there would still have been, from the top of Little Duckhawk Peak, a sense of the presence of a mountain of immense height looming to the south.

Buckley did not visit the Smoky Mountain region again until the spring of 1858, when he traveled from Georgia on the East Tennessee Railroad. Buckley later mentioned his railroad tour of East Tennessee in a letter addressed to the *Weekly Raleigh Register* in response to his controversy with Thomas Clingman.<sup>13</sup> In the letter, Buckley recalled making a comment to Judge Jacob Peck of New Market, Tennessee, that he thought the peaks of the Smokies were higher than those of the Black Mountains in North Carolina, a decision he implied was based upon observations from his earlier trip in 1842.<sup>14</sup> A few weeks later, Buckley

<sup>10</sup>The Epsom Salts Manufacturing Company was organized by a group from Oconaluftee whose members included Robert Collins, a native mountaineer who would later lead the Buckley - Clingman party into the Smoky highlands. Gary C. Jenkins, "The Mining of Alum Cave," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications* 60 (1988): 78-86.

<sup>11</sup>Buckley, "Notes of a Botanical Tour—No. III," 274-275.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup>Communication from S. B. Buckley, October 27, 1858, *Weekly Raleigh Register*, November 10, 1858.

<sup>14</sup>Jacob Peck served as a justice of the Supreme Court of the State of Tennessee from 1822-1834. See John W. Green, *Lives of the Judges of the Supreme Court of Tennessee, 1796 - 1947* (Knoxville, 1947). Judge Peck was also a respected authority on mountains in the Smokies region, having written a scholarly article "Geological and Mineralogical Account of the Mining Districts in the State of Georgia—western part of North Carolina and of East Tennessee, with a map," *American Journal of Science and Arts* 23 (January 1833): 1-10.

crossed over to the mountains south of Asheville, North Carolina, whereupon seeing the Smokies from the southern side, "became convinced that there were mountains, unmeasured, higher than the Black."<sup>15</sup>

Intent on measuring the mountains of the Smokies, Buckley returned to New York to purchase two barometers to assist in ascertaining the elevations of the peaks.<sup>16</sup> While in New York, Buckley was informed that an acquaintance of his, Professor Arnold Guyot of Princeton University, was then in North Carolina measuring the elevations of the mountains south of Asheville. Buckley proceeded to purchase a single barometer, then returned south in hopes of finding Guyot and borrowing a second barometer from him.

Sometime around the first of September, Buckley arrived in Asheville, whereupon he became acquainted with General Bayles Edney during an accidental encounter at the Eagle Hotel.<sup>17</sup> Edney, a Democratic assemblyman and political supporter of Clingman, was aware that Clingman was also looking for Guyot, intending to enlist the professor to accompany him on an expedition into the higher Smokies. In the course of conversation, Edney discovered that Buckley was determined to go into the Smokies, and thus offered to introduce Buckley to Clingman. Buckley accepted Edney's offer and followed him to the nearby Gudger's Hotel, where Buckley and Clingman met for the first time.

Buckley and Clingman wasted little time in getting to the point of their common interest. The two quickly agreed to accompany one another on a trip into the Smokies to measure the elevations of the highest peaks. The next few days were spent making preparations for the journey, which included finding a second barometer to replace the one Buckley had hoped to acquire from Guyot. Clingman was aware that John Le Conte, a professor of geology at South Carolina College who was staying the summer in Flat Rock, North Carolina, possessed a good barometer and could probably be induced to make his instrument available for their expedition. Citing prior commitments, Clingman stated that he



Thomas Lanier Clingman, North Carolina politician at the time of his controversy with Buckley, shown here in a later photograph as a Confederate general. From D. H. Hill, Jr., *Confederate Military History, Extended Edition* - vol. 5, *North Carolina*. Courtesy of the McClung Historical Collection.

<sup>15</sup>Communication from S. B. Buckley, October 27, 1858, *Weekly Raleigh Register*, November 10, 1858.

<sup>16</sup>*Weekly Raleigh Register*, November 10, 1858; cf. letter from Thomas J. Lenoir in communication from Buckley, *Greensborough Patriot*, March 11, 1859.

<sup>17</sup>Letter from B. M. Edney in Communication from Samuel L. Love, Bayles M. Edney, and John Le Conte, November 20, 1858, *North Carolina Standard*, November 23, 1858.

was unable to contact Le Conte personally but could lend Buckley a horse for the purpose of a visit to Le Conte. Buckley rode to Flat Rock and persuaded Le Conte not only to make his barometer available, but to accompany the expedition and assist it by observing the barometer and recording the necessary readings.<sup>18</sup> Sometime in early September, Le Conte followed Buckley and Clingman to Waynesville, North Carolina, where the three of them measured some prominent peaks in the vicinity.<sup>19</sup> Leaving Le Conte in Waynesville to record readings on a stationary barometer, Buckley and Clingman, in the company of Robert Collins and Dr. Samuel L. Love, ascended higher into the Smokies, along the Indian trace that crested the mountain at Indian Gap.<sup>20</sup> From there the party proceeded west along the spine of the main divide to the top of Smoky Dome. On and around Smoky Dome, the party made measurements of the higher peaks using the Green's barometer Buckley purchased in New York.

At the conclusion of their expedition, the party returned to Waynesville, whereupon it was discovered that Le Conte had advanced on to Asheville.<sup>21</sup> Clingman supposedly proceeded to Asheville while Buckley dispatched his friend Thomas J. Lenoir to Asheville to retrieve the barometer from Le Conte.<sup>22</sup> After stationing Le Conte's barometer under the observation of a Turner Cathey, at the home of Robert Collins in Oconaluftee, Buckley, in the company of Lenoir, returned to the mountains to take more measurements.<sup>23</sup>

Although Buckley had requested that Clingman make no public statements about their discoveries until he had finished exploring the mountains,<sup>24</sup> a report appeared in the *Asheville Spectator* during the third week of September, while Buckley and Lenoir were still in the mountains, announcing the recent discovery of a peak higher than Mount Mitchell, the highest point in the Black Mountains, and credited "Messrs. Hon. T. L. Clingman, Professor Leconte, [sic] of the S.C.

<sup>18</sup>*Weekly Raleigh Register*, November 10, 1858; cf. letter from B. M. Edney.

<sup>19</sup>The precise dates of the Buckley - Clingman expedition are not recorded. In a letter to his brother, Thomas Lenoir states that Buckley had visited the mountains the previous spring and was returning to them in September. John Le Conte, in a letter to his friend Benjamin Peirce, dated September 4, 1858, professes no knowledge of his impending trip to the Smokies; instead he refers to an earlier intent to visit the Black Mountains with his brother Joseph. Buckley, in a communication to the *Greensborough Patriot*, March 11, 1859, reports that the party returned to Waynesville on September 15. The Lenoir letter is in the Perkins Library at Duke University. The Le Conte letter is in the Bancroft Library at the University of California.

<sup>20</sup>Letter from Samuel L. Love in Communication from Samuel L. Love, Bayles M. Edney, and John Le Conte, November 20, 1858, *North Carolina Standard*, November 23, 1858.

<sup>21</sup>*Weekly Raleigh Register*, November 10, 1858.

<sup>22</sup>*Weekly Raleigh Register*, November 10, 1858; cf. letter from Thomas J. Lenoir in the *Greensborough Patriot*, March 11, 1859.

<sup>23</sup>Communication from Buckley in the *Greensborough Patriot*, March 11, 1859.

<sup>24</sup>*Greensborough Patriot*, March 11, 1859.



College, and Prof. Buckley, [sic] of New York" with the discovery.<sup>25</sup> The newspaper report, however, registered considerable doubt as to whether the peak in the Smokies was actually higher than Mount Mitchell, and suggested that the measurement be verified with a more rigorous test. The report recommended that "there be a suspension of judgment, until the test we have suggested shall have been applied, and the results accurately and definitely known." The editors of the *Spectator* were neither politically nor personally predisposed toward the senator and may have cast doubt on the accuracy of the discovery more as a matter of their anti-Clingman sentiment than for any specific scientific reasons.<sup>26</sup>

The editors' suspicions about the veracity of Clingman's discovery stemmed from an earlier controversy involving the Senator's claim to have been the first to discover the highest peak in the Black Mountains, then recognized as the highest point east of the Mississippi. Clingman reported his findings in the Black Mountains to Joseph Henry, secretary of the Smithsonian Institution. Henry published Clingman's claim as discoverer of the highest point in the Black Mountains of North Carolina, thus setting off a bitter and highly publicized dispute involving the Senator and those who contested his claim, contending that the senator had unscrupulously usurped an honor that rightly belonged to Elisha Mitchell, a popular and highly regarded professor of chemistry, geology, and mineralogy at the University of North Carolina.<sup>27</sup>

Mitchell had supposedly climbed to the highest point of the Black Mountains in 1835 and had published notes of his excursion. More than twenty years later, Clingman contested Mitchell's discovery, claiming that the scientist had actually climbed another nearby peak and that Clingman himself had been the true discoverer of the highest point in the Blacks. In an effort to defend his claim against Clingman's charges, Mitchell returned to the Blacks on June 27, 1857. Hiking alone, Mitchell fell from a precipice and was killed. Word of his death inspired Mitchell's friends and Clingman's enemies to take up the standard for the fallen scientist. Within the year, a memorial service honoring Mitchell was held on the pinnacle of the contested peak. During the service, William Wilson, the guide who accompanied Mitchell on his 1835 excursion, testified to the assembled crowd that "this is the peak to which I led Dr. Mitchell, more than twenty years ago, and he climbed a balsam tree . . . on the very peak."<sup>28</sup> The bod-

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<sup>25</sup>*Asheville News*, October 7, 1858. The *Spectator* article, which appeared "some two weeks ago," was reprinted in this issue of the *News*.

<sup>26</sup>Editorial comment about the *Spectator* in the *Asheville News*, September 30, 1858.

<sup>27</sup>For a thorough account of the Clingman - Mitchell controversy, see "'A Whole Torrent of Mean and Malevolent Abuse': Party Politics and the Clingman - Mitchell Controversy," pt. 1, *North Carolina Historical Review* 70 (July 1993): 241-265, and pt. 2 (October 1993): 401-429. Also see Thomas E. Jeffrey's excellent biography *Thomas Lanier Clingman: Fire Eater from the Carolina Mountains* (Athens, 1998) for a detailed analysis of the social and political context of the Clingman - Mitchell controversy.

<sup>28</sup>Charles Phillips, et. al., eds., *A Memoir of the Rev. Elisha Mitchell* (Chapel Hill, 1858), 77.

ily remains of the scientist were interred on the summit and David L. Swain, president of the University of North Carolina and half owner of the land on which the ceremony was taking place, pronounced that the peak would henceforth be known as "Mount Mitchell." At the conclusion of the service, the Clingman-Mitchell controversy was, for all practical purposes, finished.



Elisha Mitchell, a popular professor at the University of North Carolina, was involved in an earlier controversy with Clingman regarding the measurement of the highest peak in the Black Mountains, later known as Mt. Mitchell. © North Carolina Museum of History, Raleigh, used by permission.

In the 1858 report announcing the discovery by the Buckley-Clingman expedition, the *Spectator* cited John Le Conte as the source of its information. Le Conte, acting on the assumption "that the measurement of the Smoky was undertaken entirely on the suggestion of Mr. Clingman," advocated "that the highest peak should bear his name."<sup>29</sup> With a sarcastic reference to the recent final events of the Clingman-Mitchell controversy, the *Spectator* endorsed Le Conte's suggestion, remarking that "if then it is determined that the pinnacle of the Smoky is higher than the summit of the Black, let it in all conscience be called Mt. Clingman, and let him be buried there."<sup>30</sup> Two weeks later, Thomas W. Atkin, the pro-Clingman editor of the *Asheville News* reprinted the *Spectator* article in his own paper, readily embracing the *Spectator's* "proposition to call the highest peak of the Smokey [sic] Mountains *Mount Clingman*." Although Atkin remained "well satisfied as ever that Mr. Clingman was right in the former controversy," he was eager to defer to the suggestion by Mitchell's friends "that Mr. Clingman's name should be indissolubly connected with a still higher Mountain."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Letter from Love in the *North Carolina Standard*, November 23, 1858.

<sup>30</sup>The *Spectator* article was reprinted in the October 7 issue of the *Asheville News*, but without the concluding phrase "and let him be buried there." These concluding words appear in a reference to the article by Buckley in his communication to the *Greensborough Patriot*, March 11, 1859.

<sup>31</sup>*Asheville Spectator* in the *Asheville News*, October 7, 1858.

If Atkin assumed that the controversy between Clingman and Mitchell had been peaceably absolved with the *Spectator* article, he must certainly have been startled to read the paper's subsequent issue in which the editors admit that "in giving the principal credit to Mr. Clingman in the late measurement of the high peak of the Smoky Mountain we made a mistake." In the *Spectator*'s revised account, Buckley is purported to have measured the mountains, Le Conte to have observed the stationary barometer, "while Mr. Clingman was of little or no assistance." Without citing a source for their revised information, the editors freely assumed that "if we are correctly informed the main credit of the discovery . . . belongs to Professor S.B. Buckley [sic] of New York."<sup>32</sup>

In his editorial response to the retraction, Atkin carefully relieved Buckley of any responsibility for the *Spectator* article, shifting the blame to the camp of Clingman's political enemies. "We have no reason to suppose that Mr. Buckley is in any way responsible for its article, and have not the slightest wish to undervalue in any way what he may have done." After reminding his readers "that the conductors of that paper are not in the habit of adopting Mr. Clingman's views, or taking suggestions from him," Atkin averred that Clingman alone "was aware of the existence and position of the principal points of this range, and he described particularly the situation of the peak, since ascertained to be the highest, before leaving this place."<sup>33</sup> This and the evidence of Clingman's organizing the expedition made it "clear that if either of them is entitled to more credit than the other, it is he who was previously aware of the position and height of the mountain, indicated them to the other, and conducted him to it." In Clingman's defense Atkin postulated that the senator had been "actuated by a desire to ascertain and bring to notice the heights of the Mountains of the State, and not merely . . . to give names to any of the peaks when measured."<sup>34</sup>

Atkin erred badly in assuming that Buckley would have no objection to assigning Clingman's name to the highest peak in the Smoky Mountains. Buckley responded to Atkin's editorial in a communication to the *Raleigh Register*, unleashing a personal attack upon the senator that surpassed anything written in the *Spectator*. Alluding to Clingman's recent dispute with Professor Mitchell, Buckley averred that Clingman was "ambitious to have the highest mountain east of the Mississippi river bear his name," and consequently merely awarded to himself the distinction of measuring the highest peak in the Smokies just as he had earlier attempted to usurp Mitchell's accomplishments in the Blacks. "The fact is," Buckley concluded, "Clingman never measured the height of the Black or any other mountain." Buckley furthermore accused Clingman of being of "a certain class of persons ambitious for distinctions, having little talent or moral honesty, who avail themselves of the labor of others" and "who claim

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<sup>32</sup>*Asheville Spectator* in the *Daily Progress* (New Bern), October 16, 1858.

<sup>33</sup>Contrary to what Atkin implies, others before Clingman had advanced the claim that peaks in the Smokies were higher than those of the Blacks. See the *Highland Messenger*, June 19, 1840.

<sup>34</sup>*Asheville News*, October 14, 1858.

inventions and discoveries, not their own."<sup>35</sup>

Buckley insisted that his belief in the superiority of the height of the peaks in the Smokies to those of the Blacks predated his acquaintance with Senator Clingman. He outlined his intent to visit Smoky Dome at his first meeting with Clingman at the Gudger Hotel whereupon, Buckley contends, the senator "*unasked* offered to accompany me . . . as soon as he learnt [sic] of my business." Rather than contributing to the success of the expedition, "Clingman did not render me any assistance, but his officiousness was so annoying that I managed to get on the two highest mountain tops first, arrange and observe the instruments before his arrival." Despite the senator's irksome behavior, Buckley extended to him a generous gesture in offering "Mr. Clingman the name of the second highest mountain." Clingman contemptuously spurned Buckley's proposal, replying "that his name had already been given to what was considered as the highest point of land east of the Mississippi, and that his friends would consider it derogatory to his honor if he should accept of any thing less, and that his enemies would consider it as a triumph."<sup>36</sup>

Atkin was correct in suspecting that Buckley had played no role in the retraction published by the *Asheville Spectator*. It was probably John D. Hyman, former editor of the *Spectator*, who informed the newspaper of its error in initially giving Clingman credit for discovering the highest peak in the Smokies and suggested that the newspaper retract its earlier report.<sup>37</sup> Hyman was Clingman's antagonist during the senator's earlier dispute with the Mitchell supporters and later published Buckley's measurements in the *Weekly Raleigh Register*, including the notation "Mt. Buckley, (the highest peak)" of which "there seems to be no doubt that the credit of the discovery . . . belongs to Prof Buckley."<sup>38</sup>

Buckley's attack in the October 27 issue of the *Register* came only a few days before the North Carolina state legislature convened for the elections for United States senator. Clingman had been appointed the previous May by Governor Thomas Bragg to fill the unexpired term of Asa Biggs. The appointment was temporary pending the election in November. As the elections were close at hand, Clingman's supporters wasted little time in castigating the politician's new antagonist. On November 23 there appeared in the *North Carolina Standard* a report denouncing Buckley's role in discovering the highest peak in the Smokies and containing letters from Samuel L. Love and Bayles M. Edney, Democratic assemblymen who had accompanied Buckley and Clingman on their expedition into the Smoky Mountains. Edney testified that Buckley "manifested no knowledge whatever of the Smoky Mountain," and suggested that the scientist was

<sup>35</sup>*Weekly Raleigh Register*, November 10, 1858.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup>Jeffrey, pt. 2, 423.

<sup>38</sup>Communication from John D. Hyman, November 17, 1858 in the *Weekly Raleigh Register*, December 1, 1858.

invited on the expedition solely "because his barometer would be of service." Edney attempted to discredit Buckley's standing as a scientist by insinuating that he was not familiar with his own instruments. Love's letter advanced similar accusations, claiming that Buckley "did not profess to have any knowledge of the Smoky range," to the point that the party's "movements were entirely under the direction of Mr. Clingman." He furthermore claimed that "Mr. Clingman always adjusted and observed the barometer himself at each place of observation," and found it necessary "to explain to Mr. Buckley the importance of frequent observation at short intervals." Love concluded his letter by averring that "the publication in the *Spectator* of which Mr. Buckley complains, was made . . . from information derived from Prof Le Conte without any knowledge or information from Mr. Clingman." He attached to his own report "an exact copy" of a letter from Le Conte to Clingman in which Le Conte gives his calculations for three peaks in the Smoky range, the highest of which he designated "Clingman's Peak."<sup>39</sup> Love intended to imply, of course, that Le Conte had based his calculations on measurements made solely by Thomas Clingman.

A few days after the publication of the Love and Edney letters, Thomas Atkin launched a vituperative attack on Buckley's personal character and credibility as a scientist. Transposing the initials to read "B.S. Buckley," Atkin reported that the scientist "has not the capacity to measure a mountain, or a peck of potatoes even, correctly." Atkin offered "proof to show conclusively that 'B.S. Buckley' is entitled to *no credit at all* for the measurement of the mountain—that he was totally ignorant of its locality and height—that he was of no kind of service to the party who visited it." As evidence for his so-called proof, Atkin merely reprinted the Love and Edney letters recently published in *North Carolina Standard*.<sup>40</sup>

To solidify his own claim as the rightful discoverer of Smoky Dome, Buckley released for publication accounts of his recent sojourn into the Smoky Mountains and his measurements of the prominent peaks there. The first appeared as a letter from John Hyman to the *Weekly Raleigh Register* with a preliminary list of a few peaks measured by Buckley together with brief annotations on the location and height of each.<sup>41</sup> Here, for the first time in published form, the names Guyot and Le Conte were affixed to the second and third highest peaks in the Smokies. The highest peak, heretofore known as Smoky Dome, was designated as "Mt. Buckley."

<sup>39</sup>Communication from Samuel L. Love, Bayles M. Edney, and John Le Conte, November 20, 1858, *North Carolina Standard*, November 23, 1858.

<sup>40</sup>*Asheville News*, December 2, 1858. Atkin demonstrated little ability as editor of the *Asheville News*, however his efforts as a party servant in that section of North Carolina where Whig sentiments prevailed were not to be discounted. When Clingman, who had been the Whig idol of the West, switched over to the Democratic party as the leader of the mountain district of Western North Carolina, Atkin threw himself into the campaign with Clingman. See Clarence Clifford Norton, "Democratic Newspapers and Campaign Literature in North Carolina, 1835-1861," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 6 (October 1929): 345-361.

<sup>41</sup>*Weekly Raleigh Register*, December 1, 1858.

A month later, a more complete report compiled from field notes and letters received from Buckley appeared in the *Journal of the American Geographical and Statistical Society*. This report specifically mentions five peaks which "are in the range of what are called the Smoky Mountains, and have never before had specific names bestowed on them." The report identifies the individuals honored by the designations Mount Le Conte, Saffords Peak, Mount Guyot, Mount Henry, and Mount Buckley. The latter of these, which "so far as we now know, is the highest point in the United States, east of the Rockies," was "so named by the associate of Mr. Buckley in his work."<sup>42</sup> The writer gives no indication which of Buckley's associates suggested the name.

While the remainder of the report consists of observations apparently culled directly from Buckley's field notes, there are clear indications that the writer attempted to verify the factual basis of the report. Appended to the report in tabular form is "a description of the several mountains measured barometrically by Professor Buckley in 1858 . . . which we have obtained from another source."<sup>43</sup>

Two months later Buckley published a scientific paper in the *American Journal of Science and Arts* in which he briefly recapitulated the history of attempts to measure the mountains in and around the vicinity of the Blacks.<sup>44</sup> For purposes of comparison, Buckley included a table of those measurements made by Elisha Mitchell in 1838 and 1844, and those made by Arnold Guyot in 1856. As part of his report Buckley included a similar table of those mountains south and west of the Blacks which he himself had measured in 1858. Listed in this table are the elevations of several points in the Smoky Mountains, the highest of which, Mount Buckley at 6,670 feet, was determined by "observations made . . . at two different visits, and a mean result between the two calculations." The remainder of the report is a lengthy narrative describing the unique geology and flora of the Smoky Mountains and confirming, to some extent, Buckley's detailed knowledge of the area.

Buckley had little difficulty refuting the attempts by Love and Edney to discredit his scholarly credentials, and little difficulty proving that he was a respected scientist, that he had, prior to meeting Clingman, serious intentions of measuring the uncharted peaks of the Smokies, that Clingman had actually collected no data on their joint expedition, and that Clingman and his cronies, Love and Edney, were the ones ignorant of the names of the scientific instruments. In a long communication to the *Greensborough Patriot*, Buckley submitted affidavits from prominent scholars, including the imminent botanist Asa Gray, attesting to his respected standing in the scientific community. In his report Buckley included letters from Thomas Lenoir and John Le Conte which challenge critical points

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<sup>42</sup>"Mountains of North Carolina," *Journal of the American Geographical and Statistical Society* (January 1859), 19-21.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>S. B. Buckley, "Mountains of North Carolina and Tennessee," *American Journal of Science and Arts*, 2nd ser. 27 (March 1859): 286-294.

of Love's and Edney's accounts of the Buckley-Clingman expedition. Contrary to Edney's contention that Buckley was ignorant of barometric measurements and thus "could not be of any use, as he seemed to have little or no knowledge of such subjects,"<sup>45</sup> Lenoir claimed that he was with Buckley while the scientist was "taking barometrical observations on more than a dozen high points, including some of the Smoky Mountains, and saw no one render [Buckley] any *essential assistance*."<sup>46</sup> Lenoir's attestation of Buckley's competence in barometrical measurements was affirmed by the appearance in the *American Journal of Science and Arts* of Buckley's scholarly report of his measurements, a report that the distinguished geologist Arnold Guyot referred to as "the publication of his [Buckley's] meritorious measurements made in Sept. 1859."<sup>47</sup>

In a letter to Buckley, John Le Conte stated unequivocally that "there were but two barometers used in the several measurements, viz. yours [Buckley's] and mine,"<sup>48</sup> a direct contradiction to the claim by the Clingman party that four barometers were used. Le Conte made the same assertion to his friend and professional colleague, Benjamin Peirce, that only two barometers were in use. He professed to Peirce that he has great confidence in the measurements because "in the first place, Mr. Buckley's barometer, as well as mine, were made by Green; and numerous comparisons proved, that the two instruments gave precisely the *same reading*. Secondly, the *weather* was clear and steady: and in the third place, the observations were strictly *simultaneous*."<sup>49</sup>

The attempt by Clingman's supporters to accrue support to their case by claiming that public knowledge of Clingman's exploits on the Smoky Mountains were "derived from Prof. LeConte, [sic] without any knowledge or information from Mr. Clingman"<sup>50</sup> was perhaps a reflection of slightly less than accurate information conveyed from Clingman to Le Conte. Le Conte later confessed that "inasmuch as I have expressed myself quite positively in relation to Mr. Clingman's claim to the honor of having the highest peak of the Smoky Mountains named after him; I wish to inform you, that . . . I should not have felt myself authorized to express *any opinion* in regard to the subject. My former opinion was based upon Mr. Clingman's statement."<sup>51</sup>

<sup>45</sup>Letter from B. M. Edney in the *North Carolina Standard*, November 23, 1858.

<sup>46</sup>Letter from Thomas Lenoir in the *Greensborough Patriot*, March 11, 1859.

<sup>47</sup>"Guyot's Measurements of the Mountains of Western North Carolina," a letter from Arnold Guyot to the *Asheville News*, July 18, 1860. Guyot's letter was edited and reprinted in *Selections from the Speeches and Writings of Hon. Thomas L. Clingman of North Carolina*, Thomas L. Clingman, ed., 2nd ed. (Raleigh, 1878), 138-147.

<sup>48</sup>Letter from John Le Conte in the *Greensborough Patriot*, March 11, 1859.

<sup>49</sup>Letter from John Le Conte to Benjamin Peirce is among the Le Conte Papers in the Bancroft Library at the University of California.

<sup>50</sup>Letter from Dr. S. L. Love, in the *North Carolina Standard*, November 23, 1858.

<sup>51</sup>Letter from John Le Conte in the *Greensborough Patriot*, March 11, 1859.

Whatever statement Le Conte may have received from Clingman, it contained little in the way of measurement of mountains. "Based upon the data furnished by the barometric observations of yourself, Mr. Buckley, and myself,"<sup>52</sup> Le Conte produced calculations for only three peaks in the Smoky Mountain range. Later, Buckley correctly asked, "where are the observations which he [Clingman] made at the many points which we visited? Why has he not given us the results of these observations, and told us the heights of those minor points, which he was so anxious to have measured? Unfortunately, for him, he did not make any observations with the barometer at said points."<sup>53</sup> Buckley's suspicions can be corroborated by the fact that the only published measurements of peaks in the Smoky Mountains that attribute any effort to Thomas Clingman are those three calculated for him by John Le Conte.



Early sketch of the Smoky Mountains. Courtesy of UT Special Collections.

Sometime soon after his return from the second expedition into the Smoky Mountains, Buckley was entertaining Zebulon Vance at his room in the Eagle Hotel in Asheville. The two were later joined by Samuel Love and the conversation turned to the recent controversy surrounding Buckley's expedition into the Smoky Mountains with Clingman and about "who was entitled to the honor of having measured that range." Of the conversation, Vance recalled that Buckley and "Mr. Collins, the guide, going too fast for the rest of the party; of Mr. Clingman getting angry at Collins; that you [Buckley] got to the top some half-hour ahead of the others; and that you had taken the observations of the barometer. To all this, Dr. Love, with an assenting nod said 'yes.'"<sup>54</sup>

Earlier, Love may have been willing to curry favor with Clingman by supporting the senator's claims to have measured the Smokies, particularly when the antagonist was an unknown outsider like Buckley. But in the presence of Vance, himself a formidable political figure and one familiar with the intrigues of Clingman's earlier contention with Mitchell, Love was perhaps reluctant to continue supporting a questionable Clingman line. Vance clearly trusted the veracity of Love's "assenting nod" and accompanying "yes" in allowing the account to be published and thus incurring the risk of public retribution from Clingman.

The deciding opinion in the dispute between Buckley and Clingman was

<sup>52</sup>Letter from John Le Conte in the *North Carolina Standard*, November 23, 1858.

<sup>53</sup>Communication from Buckley, *Greensborough Patriot*, March 11, 1859.

<sup>54</sup>Extract of letter from the Hon. Z. B. Vance in the *Greensborough Patriot*, March 11, 1859.



issued July 18, 1860, by Arnold Guyot in a scientific report published in the *Asheville News*. At the time, Guyot was widely regarded as the foremost authority in the country on the science of measuring mountains. For the previous ten years the Swiss geologist had devoted the greater part of his summers to studying the geography of the Allegheny mountains system, particularly in ascertaining the heights of the more notable peaks of the White and Green mountains in New England and the Adirondacks in New York. During the summer of 1856, Guyot ventured into the Black Mountains of North Carolina, continuing his own investigations while attempting to verify the earlier work of Mitchell and Clingman.

It was only a matter of time before Guyot turned his attention to the Great Smoky Mountains. During the summer of 1859 Guyot entered the Smokies along the Straight Fork of the Oconaluftee River and, following the ridge of Balsam Mountain, ascended to the crest of the stateline divide. From that point he proceeded west along the divide, taking barometric observations of the higher peaks of the Smokies, including those on Mount Le Conte in Tennessee, five miles north of the main divide.

In the report of his expedition Guyot admitted "though, when studying a group of mountains, my attention is far from being confined to the measurement of the elevation of the highest points, which is a fact of less importance than the physical structure, the proportion of all parts and the relative situation of the various chains composing it, being aware of the interest which was felt among the people of the mountain region in knowing the comparative elevation of the Black Mountain and the great Smoky range, I devoted a special care to that object." Guyot outlined in meticulous detail the procedures taken in measuring the highest point in the Smokies, which he calculated to be at "an altitude of 6660 feet above the level of the sea . . . a height considerably less than that found in 1858, by the observations of Hon. Thomas L. Clingman, Mr. Buckley and Professor Lecompt [sic]."<sup>55</sup>

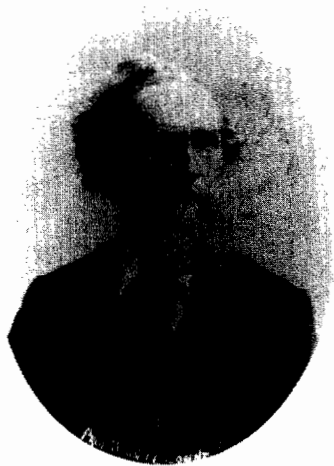
Guyot acknowledged his indebtedness to Buckley and Clingman for their pioneering efforts to measure the Smokies and graciously suggested that the difference "does not arise from any error of observation, or calculation in that measurement," but that the "great portion of it is due to the difference in the elevation of Waynesville, where one of the barometers was observed, assumed by the gentlemen just mentioned; the rest owing to the influence of the heat of mid-day, during which the observations were made."<sup>56</sup>

As a general rule Guyot utilized the most currently popular local name for identifying specific points he measured. Wherever a place name is uncertain, "it is for the people of the surrounding country to choose the one that they prefer. That one the geographer will adopt." It is in following this practice that Guyot

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<sup>55</sup>"Guyot's Measurement of the Mountains of Western North Carolina," *Asheville News*, July 15, 1860.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*



John Le Conte, who was involved in both the Buckley-Clingman expedition and the controversy that followed. Courtesy of the author.

implicitly acknowledged that Samuel Buckley was primarily responsible for measuring the highest point in the Smokies and, at the same time, made permanent the notion that this highest point should be named for Thomas Clingman. "As to the Smoky range and the mountains of Haywood county, whenever I do not find any name current among the people living about the mountain, I preserve the one attached to it by Mr. S. B. Buckley, in the publication of his meritorious measurements made in Sept. 1858."<sup>57</sup> Guyot was perfectly willing to accept Buckley's designations of the names Mount Guyot and Mount Le Conte respectively to the second and third highest peaks in the Smokies, but not to having Mount Buckley affixed to the highest. "As to the highest group of the great Smoky Mountain, however, I must remark, that in the whole valley of the Tuckasege [sic] and Oconaluftee I heard of but one name applied to the highest point, and it is that of Mount Clingman,—the greatest authority around the peak, Robert Collins, Esq., knows of no other."<sup>58</sup>

Guyot attempted to justify his decision to supplant the appellation "Mount Buckley" with "Mount Clingman" by invoking the spurious argument advanced by the Clingman supporters that the senator had "for a long time directed his attention to that point." Guyot's choice of names probably stemmed from his desire to avoid the kind of internecine controversy that divided the scientific community during the Clingman-Mitchell dispute rather than for any personal

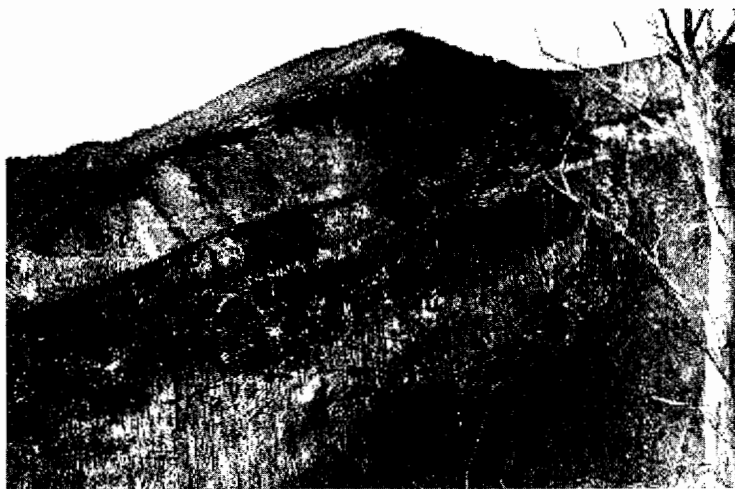
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<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Guyot's contention here is not correct. A visitor to the area writing for the *Southern Literary Messenger* at the same time Guyot penned his letter to the *Asheville News* was fully aware that the highest point in the Smokies was also referred to locally as Mount Buckley. See R., of Tennessee, "A Week in the Great Smoky Mountains," *Southern Literary Messenger* 31 (August 1860): 131.

preference he may have had for either Buckley or Clingman. Except in the case of Robert Collins, who was hardly a disinterested observer, it is unlikely that Guyot found anyone in the "whole valley of the Tuckasege and Oconaluftee" who knew the highest peak only as Mount Clingman. More than likely, the peak was still known locally as Smoky Dome. Guyot implicitly acknowledged this in his report when he inadvertently designates "the central or highest peak . . . as Clingman's Dome." In only one other instance during his professional career, in a table appended to a scientific report, did Guyot refer to the appellation "Clingmans Dome;" even then the name Clingman was misspelled.<sup>59</sup>

Clingman, like Buckley, realized that the common man had little, if any, interest in the naming of an entity as vague and ill-defined as a distant mountain peak, especially if it afforded no immediate pragmatic value. The naming of mountains would be the domain of surveyors, scientists, and map-makers, those whose tasks it would be to measure and record its whole extent. Ever mindful of his place in history and acutely aware of Guyot's stature in the scientific community, Clingman later published his *Selections from the Speeches and Writings of Hon. Thomas L. Clingman of North Carolina* in which the senator included a slightly edited version of Guyot's letter to the *Asheville News*. Here, as did Love and Edney in their newspaper editorials and Le Conte through his unfortunate letter, Clingman allowed others to advance his claim on his behalf and conse-



Mt. Guyot, named by Buckley in honor of Arnold Guyot, Swiss geologist and a recognized authority on the measurement of mountains. Photo by Dutch Roth, courtesy of UT Special Collections.

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<sup>59</sup>Arnold Guyot, "On the Appalachian Mountain System," *The American Journal of Science and Arts*, 2nd ser. 31 (March 1861): 187.

quently absolved himself from the difficult task of providing evidence of accomplishment. Clingman's self promotion was not to go unrewarded. In 1932 the United States Geographic Board officially designated Clingmans Dome as the highest peak in the Great Smokies and credited Arnold Guyot with having named the peak.<sup>60</sup>

Clingman prevailed over Buckley to the extent that the highest point in the Smoky Mountains is now universally recognized as Clingmans Dome. This does not negate the fact that Buckley's efforts to immortalize his own name were not equally successful. In his naming of Mount Le Conte, Saffords Peak, Mount Guyot, Mount Henry, and Mount Buckley as a cluster of significant Smoky Mountain peaks, Buckley cleverly associated himself with four of the more distinguished and recognizable names in the American scientific community. Later, when Arnold Guyot suggested the moniker "Clingmans Dome" rather than "Mount Buckley" be affixed to the highest peak, he did not altogether spurn Buckley's honor, but designated "the south peak next in height as Mount Buckley."<sup>61</sup> Guyot may have made this concession more as an appreciation for Buckley's having named Mount Guyot in his honor rather than from any particular regard the geologist may have had for Buckley's scientific achievements. Nevertheless, Guyot's decision, later ratified by the United States Geographic Board, virtually assured that the name Samuel Botsford Buckley would forever stand among the pantheon of Smoky Mountain notables.

To his everlasting credit, Samuel Buckley amply demonstrated his contribution to Smoky Mountain exploration, leaving a minor legacy of mountain-naming and documented accounts of his measurements that were worthy of notice by the most imminent scientists of his time. Thomas Clingman achieved little on his one trip into the Smokies. He collected no measurements and tendered no reports. Yet, after unscrupulously intimating to the inestimable John Le Conte that he had measured these mountains, Thomas Clingman received the good fortune of Arnold Guyot's questionable decision and is honored with "Clingmans Dome."

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<sup>60</sup>"Decisions of the United States Geographic Board," no. 13, rendered January 15, 1932, Library of Congress, Washington.

<sup>61</sup>"Guyot's Measurement of the Mountains of Western North Carolina," *Asheville News*, July 15, 1860.